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Welcome to the latest issue of Dine. It's so exciting to be part of the London restaurant scene, which is bursting with news and openings this spring. For starters, many chefs are launching solo venues in the capital.

Jason Atherton made the news when he left Gordon Ramsay's empire, having created Maze, a concept that has been expanded around the globe. Now going solo, we interviewed him for our **Chef's CV**, which looks at his journey that led to opening his own restaurant – Pollen Street Social.

Our **New in town** choice had to be Dinner by Heston, living up to its hype as the opening of the decade. Many members have already visited and given glowing feedback, some of which you can read in this issue. The verdict from me and the team here is that it's a must-try and an absolutely winning addition to the capital.

Also in Knightsbridge, Zuma has been a consistently hot booking, always on members' lips and popular in our weekly table availability update. Our **Icon** section explores why we love Rainer Becker's constantly evolving cuisine and the restaurant's range of dining options for different occasions.

This issue's **Focus on** feature celebrates an unusual but effective ingredient pairing – cheese and whisky. I've been hearing more and more of this coupling and wanted to understand the theory behind it. Both products offer huge diversity, and you can find them at any restaurant, home or dinner party. This should inspire you to try the combination on your next night out.

Our top five most booked

1. Dinner by Heston
2. Hakkasan Mayfair
3. Zuma
4. The Fat Duck
5. The Ivy

As always, we value immensely your feedback, comments on and participation in the Dining Club service. If you would like us to feature a venue that's dear to you or somewhere you want to find out more about, do not hesitate to contact us.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of Dine.

Hernan and the Dining Club team



Chef's CV: Jason Atherton

Born: Sheffield, 1971

Training:

- At the age of 16, I knew I wanted to be a chef. I don't know where the inspiration came from – my mum could cook but people wouldn't have travelled for miles to eat her food.
- Working in the kitchen at the County Hotel in Skegness, I was the only one to go out and buy cookbooks and to practice my knife skills.
- In 1989, when my mother was on holiday, I booked a one-way ticket to London. Knocking on the doors of all the top chefs, I was finally given a chance by Boyd Gilmour. On my days off I was doing unpaid work at Pierre Koffmann's La Tante Claire, until he gave me a full-time position.
- In 1992, I joined Marco Pierre White at Harvey's, before moving to Restaurant Marco Pierre White at the Hyde Park Hotel.
- In 1998, I backpacked to Barcelona and slept on the beach before cycling to El Bulli in search of a job. My determination paid off and I became the first British chef to complete a stage in Ferran Adrià's esteemed kitchen.
- In 2002, I joined the Gordon Ramsay group as executive chef for Verre and Glasshouse restaurants in Dubai, before heading up Maze in Mayfair in 2005, winning it a Michelin star and expanding the brand across the globe, including openings in Melbourne, Cape Town and New York.



Current: After all this experience, I felt ready to open my own place, and on 18 April Pollen Street Social will welcome its first customers. I've always

dreamed of what my own restaurant would be like – from how I would conduct my chefs to what cutlery I'd use – and now I think, 'My God, it's actually happening.'

Pollen Street Social will embrace the current wave of passion for good food and ensure everyone can enjoy a fine dining experience. I'll be in the kitchen at every service, and customers can expect a regularly changing menu. I don't do signature dishes – it's not my style. My food evolves. I might be in Japan and be blown away by a dish and use its flavours in my cooking.

Future: It's far too early to tell if I will open more restaurants, but I certainly hope so. If I do branch out, my restaurants will not have my name splashed all over them. In my opinion a restaurant should live – or die – by the food, service and atmosphere.

There is a real interest in and passion for good food in the UK at the moment and as a chef you can't rest on your laurels. Luckily, the country has some seriously talented and enthusiastic chefs and the restaurant scene can only get better.

New in town: Dinner by Heston Blumenthal

Must-try modern medieval dining from the UK's most experimental chef

A mandarin arrives on a wooden board, a sprig of green leaves still attached to its dappled skin. But cut it and instead of peeling rind you're slicing through jelly. Instead of fruit, its flesh is chicken liver parfait.

Meat Fruit (c.1500) is among the signature dishes at Dinner, Heston Blumenthal's restaurant at the Mandarin Oriental, which has rediscovered and reinvented Britain's culinary past. If the chef's Fat Duck is a laboratory at the fringe of food science, then Dinner is a library where research inspires invention. 'Britain's culinary history has always inspired me,' Blumenthal told Dining Club, 'but I really got into researching it after meeting the food historians from Hampton Court Palace in 2003.'



Months spent mining ancient tomes alongside Ashley Palmer-Watts, his long-term collaborator and head chef at Dinner, have yielded a menu drawn from centuries of royal court banquets. It takes a brigade of 25 staff and two kitchens to prepare these regal creations. Beef Royal (c.1723) is cooked in a water bath for 72 hours, giving it a buttery texture, and Topsy Cake (c.1810), soaked in Sauternes and made from spit-roasted pineapples, is a must-try dessert.

Blumenthal explained: 'We haven't copied the exact historical recipes. It's more about taking the essence of the original dish and creating something flavourful and modern.'

History has also inspired the laid-back dining room, and it's hard to decide whether its views across Hyde Park are more alluring than those of its open kitchen. Dark woods are accented with leather and tweed while playful details are peppered throughout: look for jelly-mould lights and the disappearing cookbooks. Circular medieval-style chandeliers hang from the high ceiling and the centrepiece is a mechanical pulley system, modelled on a 16th-century design, that wheels hypnotically above the open kitchen and operates the spit.

The chef's table commands the best view of the kitchen and grants diners an unprecedented insight into Blumenthal's research. Staff reveal the story behind every course as it's served, and explain how an outlandish creation such as Meat Fruit makes perfect sense in its historical context.

'In the past, especially during medieval times, living conditions and standards were very poor and food storage was primitive,' Blumenthal explains. 'Without refrigeration, most food was eaten with strong smelling ingredients such as rose oil to mask the smell of 'off' produce. However, there was a lot of theatre in dining in the days before TV, Game Boys and computers, so the recipes we researched were entertaining to say the least. The Meat Fruit was inspired by that.'

Dinner plans to serve afternoon tea and is working on its private dining menus. Blumenthal also said it will be constantly 'developing and reviewing' its menu – which could involve a return to Hampton Court. 'There were so many recipes and other culinary archives there,' he says. The future of British cooking, then, is in its past.

Members' feedback

I've had the pleasure of going twice since it opened (reserved through Ten). Service and food were impeccable on both occasions and I even had the pleasure of seeing the big man himself on Monday.

Members' feedback

We had table 11, by the kitchen, with a good view of the action, and not too noisy. Fantastic food, notably the Meat Fruit and the wing of Angus rib with amazing wine sauce and chips. Great wine list as well; we had a lovely Thierry Mortet Gevrey-Chambertin 2007. Friendly, efficient service; you wouldn't believe it's only been open a few weeks. Ashley Palmer-Watts came to our table at my request to sign our menu, and sat down and discussed the restaurant with us. The whole experience works. We will be trying to go back!

Members' feedback

Thank you for the table. Exceptional - the evening was a gastronomic triumph. Tasting the hay-marinated mackerel and Meat Fruit, we could not recall such excitingly complex food, with a vast variety of flavours that worked together magnificently. Followed by the cod in cider and powdered duck, both excellent. The highlight was the Topsy Cake, with the best tasting spit-roasted pineapple I've ever eaten. The sommelier recommended the best Chablis on the menu, which was superb.

Icon: Zuma

More than just exquisite sushi

When it launched in Knightsbridge in 2002, Zuma was an instant hit. Almost a decade later, glamorous Londoners return to the atmospheric venue for its consistent quality. Before joining Zuma, German-born Rainer Becker spent six years as executive chef at the Park Hyatt Tokyo, sparking his passion for Japanese culinary culture and inspiring his restaurant vision. He now travels between Hong Kong, Istanbul, Dubai, Miami and London, overseeing the cooking and sharing his infectious enthusiasm.



The hip restaurant is modelled on Japan's izakayas, casual taverns that serve a wide range of dishes, but the food is far more relaxed because of Becker's uncompromising attention to detail. With its modern, angular decor, Zuma could easily feel minimalist and cool, but its clean lines are offset by the exposed stone, blonde wood tables and slatted screens, which lend warmth.

Members can't get enough of Zuma, thanks to the varied experiences on offer. While the menu includes dishes that have been on it from day one, it

is constantly evolving to incorporate the chef's new creations and seasonal ingredients. The well-thought-out dishes use a variety of techniques and remarkable meticulousness, creating inimitable dining from start to finish. The menu begins with small plates such as thinly-sliced sea bass with yuzu, truffle oil and salmon roe, followed by impressively presented sashimi and sushi so intricate it seems a shame to dismantle it.

Members' feedback: Spice Market

Interesting place. Good bar downstairs. Food is mostly competent and some very good – the main course beef strips were high quality and perfectly cooked. The wine list is reasonably priced with a good spread of wines.

Exclusive offer: Home House

25 per cent membership discount

As a Dining Club member, you can enjoy three visits to all parts of Home House private members' club as a taster. You can also receive 25 per cent off the joining fee (usually £1,800) and jump the list to become a Home House member immediately, with no referral by existing members necessary.

The 10-course tasting menu – featuring wagyu beef and finishing with delectable chocolate fondant with caramel and praline – is very popular with members as it gives an overview of the eclectic plates available.

The kitchen creates a focal point where diners are entertained by the chefs' culinary drama. There are three principle kitchens; their dishes are available throughout the restaurant. Of the private dining options, members prefer the tasho table – it's set back from the main dining room but retains the buzzy atmosphere. If you don't have a reservation, head for the sushi bar where places are on a first-come, first-served basis. Killing time at the bustling bar will soon become a pleasure rather than a chore.

Satomi Okubo, Zuma's sake sommelier, currently recommends

Isojiman 'Omachi' Junmai. She says: 'This is a really exciting sake; the brewery behind it took six years to find the perfect rice. Its elegant, delicate aroma and crisp, tidy finish make the perfect accompaniment to our dishes.'

With all this success, Zuma is surprisingly still without a Michelin star. Despite being overlooked, it remains a constant fixture in our members' top five most booked restaurants and serves some of the best sushi in the city.

Members' feedback: Gauthier Soho

We were looking for Dean Street Townhouse for a quick dinner, when we stumbled upon Gauthier, which I had only vaguely heard of. Excellent service and wonderful food. Michelin-star quality and one of the best meals (including outstanding value) I've had in a while.

Members' feedback: Hawsmoor Seven Dials

Worth the wait to get into; what a great space, decor and lighting, not to mention the 1.1kg chateaubriand we shared. I still think their beef tops all the competition.

Focus on: Whisky and cheese

Malts to match what's on the board

Chocolate and honey. Almond and orange peel. Shortbread, lemon drops, grass and vanilla.

To the uninitiated, whisky is a brash spirit. But whisky sommelier Angelo Gobbi wants to help novices and enthusiasts alike discover the complex flavours of the 270 bottles at his bar in the Athenaeum Hotel.



And to do so he's enlisted an unlikely companion to tour the whisky world with: cheese.

'I see a lot of people who want a cheeseboard at the end of their meal,' he explains. 'They've finished the wine they had with dinner and don't want another bottle. They want something to go with it, but not port. So I said let's do whisky and cheese.'

The principle is simple: find malts that match the flavours of the cheese without overpowering it. The difficulty is in challenging preconceptions. 'Some people think whisky is 'in your face', but it's not,' he says. 'You'll discover vanilla, toffee, floral and chocolate notes as well as smoke and peat.'

Angelo fused his whisky knowledge with the expertise of Athenaeum chef David Marshall and Alex James, Blur bassist turned cheese guru. 'We had seven or eight different cheeses and 30 whiskies. Some of the combinations were awful, but we slowly started to find matches.'

The Balvenie DoubleWood, for example, is matured in both bourbon and sherry casks. Angelo says: 'It has a light spiciness, toffee, honey from the bourbon and fruitiness from the sherry. It's a great match for Alex's Blue Monday, which also has spicy and sweet notes.'

Strength is important too. Medium-bodied Speysides can complement delicate cheeses that would be overwhelmed with a peaty Islay malt. 'You could never match a smoky Ardbeg with a cream cheese,' Angelo explains.

But there are no set combinations, and the fun lies in discovering the unexpected.

Angelo's own experiments are punctuated with eureka moments. 'We were sipping the Aberfeldy 12-year-old when a light went off in my head,' he says. 'The spiciness of the whisky was a perfect match to parmesan.'

Whether you're pairing a smooth bourbon with a creamy slice of Suffolk Gold or the Bowmore 15-year-old with dark chocolate, Angelo's top tip is to take your time. 'Never rush. Take a sip. Add a few drops of water and see how the malt changes. Take another sip. If you want to drink whisky you need at least an hour. If you can't spare that time, then don't do it.'

Exclusive offer: Marcus Wareing at the Berkeley

Chef's table special price

Dining Club members can visit Marcus Wareing's chef's table at a price of £150 per person (five people minimum) during March and April, for all lunches and for dinner on selected days.

Members' feedback: Polpetto

Great energy, charming service and delicious food. Just thought you'd like to know. They don't take bookings, but it's perfect for a walk-in early in the week.

Members' feedback: Tempo

Thank you for suggesting Tempo; it went down well. The very pleasant front of house manager even figured out who I was before I spoke. Well-executed food - not flashy, and not what I expected given the Japanese link. I'd go again.

Members' feedback: Bocca di Lupo

Excellent for dinner. Even though there's a limited vegetarian selection, everything was great, so my companion was happy.

Members' feedback: Galvin La Chapelle

Excellent as always. Service is understated but friendly and fun. Exceptional food. An unexpectedly lovely venue in the middle of the city. I cannot recommend it highly enough and have not had a bad experience in more than ten visits.